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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9361  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 1889  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 2897  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 019121

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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN ELECTIONS (1): THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF  
PAKISTANI POLITICS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter W. Bodde,  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Pakistan is now entering a year of high political stakes, as President Musharraf grapples with his own future in the run-up to provincial and federal parliamentary while political allies and rivals parry and position themselves for possible post-election scenarios. These elections will play out against the tortured history of Pakistani democracy, a cycle that has repeated itself with dismaying regularity.

¶2. (C) This is the first in a series of cables mapping the political terrain as Pakistan approaches National and Provincial Assembly elections. This cable examines some of that history as it bears on Musharraf's decision-making process and constrains his options. Septel cables in this series will focus on the fundamentals of Pakistan's political institutions and electoral timelines, the state-of-play within the parties and electorate, whether President/General Musharraf will shed his uniform, Musharraf's coalition options and recommendations on how the U.S. can best promote credible and open elections.

Democracy in Pakistan: The Long and Winding Road  
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¶3. (C/NF) Pakistan has never been a functioning democracy, nor has it ever been a military dictatorship. Its civilian leaders have never been particularly democratic in orientation and its military leaders have never been particularly dictatorial (though General Zia ul-Haq came close). Rather, following a chaotic period of civilian rule between 1947 and 1958, Pakistan has been an unstable and dysfunctional amalgam, with the military seeking simultaneously to engage and rein in the civilians and the civilians doing the same with the military -- both with varying degrees of success.

Civilian (Un)Democrats v. Military (Un)Dictators  
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¶4. (C/NF) Pakistan's civilian leaders, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the 1970s and Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in the 1990s have all left much to be desired in the democracy department.

Z.A. Bhutto was arguably more dictatorial than any Pakistani leader before or after, civilian or military. He established the Pakistan People's Party as a vehicle to advance his personal ambitions. He brooked no dissent from his party colleagues (establishing a precedent for his daughter), arrested political opponents and established a private paramilitary service answerable to him alone. The current head of the Awami National Party, Asfandiyar Wali Khan, has shared graphic descriptions with post of being tortured in Bhutto's prison. Benazir and Nawaz never enjoyed the power wielded by Z.A. Bhutto, but even within their more limited remit, they were far from democratic ) a characteristic best illustrated by the autocratic way they continue to run their respective political parties. Both the Benazir and Nawaz governments were also notoriously corrupt.

¶5. (C/NF) Nawaz and Benazir, although now in exile, manage their parties as personal fiefdoms. Each would prefer to see their parties weakened to the point of irrelevancy than to permit alternate leadership to emerge. Nawaz has stifled the ambitions of his capable brother, Shabaz. Benazir has succeeded in driving away many of the most able members of her party, including Pakistan's current Interior Minister, Aftab Sherpao, who now leads a breakaway PPP faction. By contrast, the party's anointed, in-country leader, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, is an aging feudal landowner singularly lacking in charisma. Fahim is also an ironic choice to be heading Pakistan's premier progressive party: he has several wives and has reportedly married his sisters to the Quran -- a

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practice that kept his estates together at the expense of his sisters' marriage prospects.

Military Rule: More Than A Veneer of Democracy  
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¶6. (C/NF) For its part, Pakistan's army has traditionally shied away from monopolizing power for extended periods, preferring to "manage" civilian politicians and drive through constitutional adjustments to protect its prerogatives and its vision of the national interest. The military is keenly attuned to Pakistan's vulnerabilities, whether from external enemies (e.g., India) or internal threats in the provinces (e.g., Baloch nationalism). As India's economy has boomed, senior Pakistani military leaders have realized that the economy is also a national security concern. In the military's eyes, civilians are nave on matters of strategy, threatening the nation's security through corruption and mismanagement of the economy.

¶7. (C/NF) Whether in or out of power, the Army has enforced an unwritten rule that effectively bars civilians from interfering in matters of national security (Kashmir, India, Afghan policy), military procurement, defense spending and internal military administration (such as promotions). When in power, the Army has sought to maintain the trappings of democracy, including referenda, elections and national assemblies. President Musharraf has taken this further than any of Pakistan's previous military leaders, moving to devolve authority to the local level by establishing local bodies with indirectly-elected leaders at the District level (nazims), who have de jure decision-making and financial authority. (Note: In practice, management of district governments often remains in the the de facto control of local powerbrokers and/or "the agencies." End note.) The press has more freedom than under any of Musharraf's predecessors, civilian or military: it vigorously criticizes Musharraf himself, his political allies and the army, and openly reports the latest initiatives by opposition parties. The Supreme Court has signaled a modest but increasing willingness to act independently of the government following

the appointment of a new Chief Justice last year, ruling against the government in several recent high profile cases.

¶8. (C/NF) Musharraf does not have untrammelled decision-making power, an ironic source of frustration to Pakistani liberals, who sometimes quietly murmur that he should be more dictatorial in pushing through human rights reforms. For example, the government was either unable or unwilling to buck Islamist parties opposed to the efforts to eliminate the requirements that Pakistani passports state the bearer's religion. In late 2005, Musharraf promised to move forward on the Kalabagh dam and other hydropower projects, but was forced to back down when he ran into a political resistance from Sindhi, Pushtun and Baloch politicians.  
Governance Fatigue  
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¶9. (C/NF) For reasons relating to the military's residual professional culture and its general disdain for politicians, pressure within the ranks to relinquish governance to civilian rule tends to rise over time. For example, two years ago, a Pakistani Major General opined that Pakistan's unique history and environment argued for some form of institutionalized involvement of the military in the country's political affairs. Now, this same general privately refers to Musharraf as an isolated dictator and argues that civilian rule should be restored, albeit through a highly-manipulated election process that would place the "best" people into office. This back-to-the-barracks phenomenon is one of several factors that have contributed to the cyclical ebb and flow of Pakistani political life. Leadership in Pakistan has rotated on a roughly ten year cycle, with the civilians in charge during the 1950's; the

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military during the 60s; civilians for much of the 70s; the military in the 80s; civilians for most of the 90s; and the military, again, since 1999.

The Challenge for 2007 and Beyond  
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¶10. (C/NF) This polarization between the civilians and the military has been the fundamental dynamic of Pakistani political life for 50-some years. Both sides are clearly at fault. The dysfunctionality of democratic institutions is largely due to the sustained interference of the military. However, civilian leaders have also done their part to justify the military's apprehensions and grievances. The country manages to muddle along largely because this polarization has been tempered by family, clan and social ties that connect the elites. The challenge now confronting Musharraf is much more complex than simply holding credible elections ) he must overcome this polarization to lay a foundation for stable and sustained democratic governance.  
BODDE